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CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

March 20, 1981

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Honorable Alexander M. Haig, Jr.
The Secretary of State
Washington, D. C. 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

During your appearance this week before the Foreign Affairs Committee I inquired about the prospect of the Department giving enhanced priority to chemical weapons discussions in an arms control context.

As I indicated at the hearing, I am convinced that the greatest human rights (as well as arms control) failure of the Carter Administration was its unwillingness to apply a forthright perspective to the Soviet Union's decision to assist Vietnam in the deployment of chemical weapons in Southeast Asia and to use such weapons itself in Afghanistan.

Given the Administration's firm embrace of the principle of linkage, a symbolic and meaningful way of reorienting the direction of SALT might well be to tie chemical weapons restraint and a treaty banning the development, production and stockpiling of these weapons to current nuclear arms control negotiations. Such linkage would bring Soviet Third World adventurism directly to the SALT negotiating table and serve as well to broaden arms control concerns away from the U. S. and Soviet preoccupation with bilateral nuclear discussions.

I would appreciate the Department's consideration of such an approach and in addition would hope that in line with your strong commitment to combat terrorism, the Department will apply a more forthright perspective to the genocidal efforts of the Vietnamese to eliminate through recourse to chemical weapons political and tribal opposition in Laos and Cambodia.

I am taking the liberty of attaching an article I wrote for the February issue of the Foreign Service Journal on the chemical weapons subject.

Sincerely,

Jim Leach
Member of Congress

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
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OFFICES:
406 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON D.C. 20515
(202) 225-6576

306 F AND M BANK BUILDING
THIRD AND JEFFERSON STREETS
BURLINGTON IOWA 52601
(319) 752-4568

322 WEST THIRD STREET
DAVENPORT, IOWA 52801
(319) 326-1841

102 S. CLINTON STREET
ROOM 505
IOWA CITY, IOWA 52240
(319) 351-0002

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"Falling as yellow or red or white rain, it causes convulsions, nausea . . . and death."

MEDICINE FROM THE SKY

JIM LEACH

Laotian tribespeople call it "medicine from the sky." Falling as yellow or red or white rain, it causes convulsions, nausea, bleeding from the nose and mouth, and death.

Lethal chemical agents, sprayed from planes and helicopters or delivered in rockets which explode above ground releasing clouds of deadly gas or dust, have been used since 1975 by Vietnamese forces against dissident groups in Laos and Kampuchea.

Evidence is mounting that similar deadly chemical weapons have been employed in recent months by the Soviets against Afghan resistance forces and by the Ethiopians against Eritrean rebels. Uncorroborated reports also exist that the Vietnamese may have "warned" the Chinese of their capacities by controlled usage of chemical weapons during Chinese brief border incursion in [illegible] 1979.

The use of [illegible] has been characterized by those who have witnessed it as new and paradoxically, to be ignored by civilized people who have difficulty facing up to unconscionable behavior. But it is clear that there is an ominous trend toward legitimization as well as proliferation of chemical weapons usage. Reports, in fact, are beginning to surface of chemical weapons preparation being made by both sides in the Iranian-Iraqi conflict and of recent purchases of chemical weapons by countries as disparate as Syria, Libya and India. And of direct strategic importance to the United States, the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies have substantial stockpiles, as do North Korea and to a lesser extent Cuba.

The perversion of science involved in the exploitation of chemical weapons represents one of the tragedies of the 20th century. First utilized by the Germans at Ypres, Belgium, in 1914, poison gas resulted in casualties estimated as high as 1,360,000 during World War I. In response to the atrocities inflicted during the war, the Geneva Protocol was negotiated in 1925 prohibiting gas and bacteriological methods of warfare. More recently, few instances of the earlier use in combat of lethal chemical agents have been documented. Chemical weapons were employed sporadically by Mussolini's troops against Ethiopia in 1935, by the Japanese in China and Taiwan in the late 1930s, and by the Egyptians in Yemen during the mid-1960s.

The renewed use of these reprehensible weapons underlines the possibility that, without new international sanctions, an enormously expensive and dangerous arms race in chemical weapons may be in the making.

The Soviet Union possesses the world's largest stockpile of chemical weapons and Russian military doctrine emphasizes chemical warfare as part of a triad of weapons of mass destruction. However, unlike the other two arms of the triad—biological and nuclear—chemical weapons are considered "conventional" in the sense that their usage implies a lower threshold strategic option. In fact, Indochina, Afghanistan and perhaps now East Africa have provided the Soviet Union with remote Third World battlefields where sophisticated chemical weapons have been tested both for effectiveness and acceptability.

The results are apparent. Whereas in the first part of this century chemical weapons were applied with terrifying consequences to trench warfare, in the past few years they have been employed with equally profound effect in guerrilla insurgency settings.

In utilizing chemical weapons in Afghanistan and encouraging its surrogates to wield them elsewhere in Asia and Africa, the Soviet Union may have misjudged the consequences of its actions. In the face of superior Soviet chemical warfare training and testing, the US Congress this past September overrode administration opposition and committed our government to the construction of a nerve gas production facility in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and to substantial downstream funding for a new generation of chemical weapons. The British, too, are devoting more resources to chemical weapons research, particularly related to defensive equipment, but the strategic

[illegible]

impact of recent chemical weapons developments goes far beyond the confines of the NATO-Warsaw Pact rivalry.

If legitimized through usage, chemical agents could all too easily become the poor man's weapon of mass destruction. Nuclear arms are beyond the financial and technical capacities of most nations and bacteriological warfare is generally regarded as too dangerous and uncontrollable. Many countries, however, can produce or obtain some types of deadly chemicals which lend themselves to military or internal police purposes. If the Soviet Union and its surrogates get away with using chemical weapons with impunity, the list of other countries willing and able to do likewise will almost certainly grow.

From the Soviet Union's perspective, there is real question whether the proliferation of chemical weapons may not carry more long-term liabilities than advantages. As long as the Soviet Union is on the side of forces which exclusively have chemical weapons at their command, the advantages are obvious. But if smaller countries or insurgency groups unsympathetic to Soviet interests obtain these weapons overwhelming Soviet military power may be offset. This could become a particularly troublesome issue in an Eastern European context where the Soviets have allowed access to and control of chemical weapons to be spread to several national forces. In the event of a nationalist rebellion, a chemical warfare brigade sympathetic to a new government could provide a devastating disincentive to Soviet intervention.

Likewise in this hemisphere, the training of Castro's army in chemical weapons techniques and the glib comment attributed to Castro that he has the capacity to spread hoof and mouth disease in the United States does not bode well for future hemispheric relations.

The Carter administration's record on arms control has been one of good intentions but futility of result. The SALT II treaty [illegible] and [illegible] development of the area of chemical warfare largely been ignored. Despite incontrovertible evidence our government has so far refused to publicly confirm employment of chemical weapons in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan by the Soviet Union and its client states. At a hearing before a House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee last April the State Department representative took the position that the United States government has no responsibility under international law to determine the validity of the evidence of chemical weapons usage. This position may be legalistically correct. But it is morally derelict.

For the United States government not to publicly make clear the certainty of the intelligence information we have at our disposal brings to mind the reluctance of Western governments during World War II to accept the powerful body of evidence which pointed to Nazi gassing of Europe's Jewish population. If civilized countries refuse to acknowledge the evidence and marshal world public opinion against the continued usage of chemical weapons, will not the legal, moral and political sanctions against their use in the future be weakened?

> "A chemical weapons initiative of this nature might help in breaking down the reluctance in the Senate to deal with SALT II and provide the new administration persuasive grounds to endorse the heart of the already negotiated treaty."

The beginning of a new administration marks an appropriate time to reappraise our policy and underscore the gravity of the issue. A number of approaches should be considered, individually and in concert. The United States government should:

1) declassify corroboratory intelligence information relating to usage of chemical weapons and make monitoring of chemical weapons usage a substantially higher intelligence collection priority;

2) [illegible] as the depositary of the 1925 Geneva Protocol, convene the signatories in order to assess the evidence and report to the world community on chemical weapons usage;

3) [illegible] voice our concerns about chemical weapons before the UN General Assembly and raise the usage issue before the Security Council;

4) request in a regional context that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Organization of African Unity investigate usage of chemical weapons in their jurisdictions;

5) most importantly, give the highest possible arms control priority to our efforts to negotiate a verifiable ban on the development, production, and stockpiling of chemical weapons, with the understanding that unless a chemical weapons convention is promptly concluded, the US will have little choice but to upgrade significantly our chemical arsenal.

Since the inception of the SALT process there has been much discourse on the issue of linkage—the question of whether nuclear arms restraints should be negotiated in a vacuum unrelated to other foreign policy concerns. In criticizing the Carter administration's arms control position, Governor Reagan made it clear that he believes Soviet actions cannot be separated from intent and that the Soviet arms buildup and expanding interventionism around the world must be factored into the SALT decision-making process.

Given President Reagan's firm embrace of the principle of linkage, a symbolic and meaningful way of reorienting the direction of SALT might well be to tie chemical weapons restraint and a treaty limiting the development, production and stockpiling of these weapons to current nuclear arms control negotiations. Such linkage would bring Soviet Third World adventurism directly to the SALT negotiating table and serve as well to broaden arms control concerns away from the US and Soviet preoccupation with bilateral nuclear discussions.

A chemical weapons initiative of this nature might help in breaking down the political reluctance in the Senate to deal with SALT II and provide the new administration persuasive grounds to endorse the heart of the already-negotiated treaty.

The new Republican president may not be as quick to endorse certain arms control positions as his predecessor, but he probably has the leadership to get any treaty that he might sanction ratified. A reluctant Reagan may be a more effective arms controller than a too-willing Carter.